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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

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12 JUL 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (SECRET): "Special Features
of the Organization and Conduct of Operations
in a Mountainous Theater of Military Operations",
by Major-General S. Tarasov

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Downgraded to Secret by Authority
of Richard Helms, DD/P, per memo
dated 14 Dec. 1962, PS# 186604



Richard Helms
Deputy Director (Plans)

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Original: The Director of Central Intelligence

cc: The Director of Intelligence and Research,
Department of State

The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency

The Director for Intelligence,
The Joint Staff

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence,
Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence
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COUNTRY : USSR

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Following is a verbatim translation of an article entitled "Special Features of the Organization and Conduct of Operations in a Mountainous Theater of Military Operations", by Major-General S. Tarasov. This article appeared in Issue 6 (61) of a special version of the Soviet journal Military Thought which is classified **SECRET** by the Soviets and is published irregularly.

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 Comment: Military Thought is published by the USSR Ministry of Defense in three versions, classified **RESTRICTED**, **SECRET**, and **TOP SECRET**. The **RESTRICTED** version has been issued monthly since 1937, while the other two versions are issued irregularly. The **TOP SECRET** version was initiated in early 1960. By the end of 1961, 61 issues of the **SECRET** version had been published, 6 of them during 1961.

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COMMENT ON A PREVIOUS ARTICLESpecial Features of the Organization and Conduct
of Operations in a Mountainous Theater
of Military Operations

by

Major-General S. Tarasov

Study and analysis of problems connected with the organization and conduct of operations in mountainous areas during the initial period of a war, based on the experience of postwar exercises, are acquiring ever greater significance. In this connection, the theoretical summaries and recommendations presented in the article by General of the Army K. Galitskiy* are of undoubted interest. In our opinion, however, some of them lack convincing substantiation.

In particular, let us examine the question of using nuclear and chemical weapons.

In mountainous terrain, because of the difficulties of troop movement and of the deeper echelonment of the most important enemy objectives, the delivery of successive, rather than massed, concentrated nuclear strikes will be more frequently advisable than it would be under normal conditions. When selecting objectives for such strikes the effectiveness of their destruction and possible changes in terrain resulting from a nuclear burst must be taken into account in all cases. Not only ground, but air bursts, as distinct from those that occur on flat ground, may create avalanches and enormous destruction, especially in areas where there are passes, gaps, and gorges, while ground bursts may also create areas of contamination with high levels of radiation. All this will impede and, in some cases, entirely preclude operations by advancing troops for a considerable length of time. Therefore, to

* Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought" No. 3(53) 1960.

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destroy the enemy under such conditions, single air nuclear bursts of low yield should be used mainly. When these cannot be delivered, or when the troops will not be able to make timely use of nuclear strikes, it is advisable to annihilate the enemy with the fire of conventional means of destruction, using chemical toxic agents. Moreover, considerably fewer nuclear warheads will apparently be allotted to an operation in mountainous areas than under usual conditions. The role of chemical weapons will therefore become more important, and they will be widely used. When planning the use of toxic agents in mountainous areas, it is necessary to determine with special care safe-distance lines for our troops and the areas (depressions, gorges, passes) in which troops will have to be in anti-chemical protection equipment.

The rate of advance of 60 to 80 km, proposed by General Galitskiy, can be achieved in a mountainous area only when the enemy's nuclear/missile weapons, and his main ground troop and aviation groupings have been effectively neutralized and destroyed. To achieve the rate of advance indicated by the author, it is also necessary to provide for the widespread use of operational and tactical airborne forces, and diversionary-reconnaissance groups to seize passes, gaps, and airfields and to destroy the enemy's means of nuclear attack and his control and guidance points. Engineer and chemical subunits should be included in the complement of the airborne forces to clear mines and remove obstacles.

Lastly, an attack in a mountainous area at a rate of 60 to 80 km is possible against a weak opponent who does not have at his disposal a sufficient quantity of nuclear weapons and tanks. As a rule, however, rates of advance will be extremely uneven and, on the whole, considerably lower than those achieved under normal conditions. Only in wide valleys and on mountain plateaus could the rates reach the figures indicated. At command-staff and troop exercises conducted during recent years in mountainous areas, the rate of advance did not exceed 50 km.

We know that there are also other features of an army

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offensive operation in mountainous and mountainous-wooded areas which differ somewhat from those of an operation on moderately rugged terrain. Thus, an offensive zone affording only a few accessible axes will become wider; the depth of an operation may vary considerably depending on the aim of the operation, on the enemy grouping, on the army's combat capabilities, and especially on the distance of the areas and objectives vitally important to the enemy, toward whose seizure the operation is directed; the duration of the operation will also increase.

The direction of the main strike must ensure that use is made of the results of employing the main forces of nuclear weapons and airborne forces for the rapid destruction of the main enemy grouping, and also for the destruction and capture of his means of nuclear attack and of the areas whose seizure constitutes the goal of the operation.

In this connection, both the main and the other strikes are decided upon in accordance with the purpose of the operation and the specific conditions of the situation. Here, it is important, first of all, to determine the enemy's nuclear/missile and other groupings and their weak and vulnerable spots. The main direction of an offensive may be changed during its course, depending on the way in which the situation develops.

Thus, a main strike may coincide with the direction of main roads, of the most important passes, and of the through valleys leading the troops of the army to the areas and objectives with whose seizure the aim of the operation is achieved. When there is a possibility of gaining the rear of the enemy's main grouping by surprise, the main strike may also be delivered on difficult terrain, shifting subsequently to a more passable axis.

The operational formation of the troops of a front in the conditions under examination is characterized by the creation of several groupings of troops in accordance with

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the number of axes selected for the delivery of strikes and by deep echelonment of forces and means along each of these axes. The troop groupings should be able to perform the tasks confronting them independently throughout the entire depth of the operation.

The operational formation of the troops should provide for their flexible maneuver along the front as well as from the depth. In the first echelon, together with separate divisions, there may be an army corps and also, sometimes, separate detachments subordinated directly to the army or to the front.

Airborne forces and combined-arms and special reserves of various designations are usually disposed along several axes. It is advisable to use helicopters to move parts of the forces and means of the reserves during the course of an operation.

One of the most complex tasks is that of organizing and maintaining unbroken coordination. Operations by individual groupings along separate axes, differences in passability, different routes of advance along each of these axes, and the difficulty of orientation - all these require particularly careful coordination between combat operations of the troops and the fire strikes delivered by missile units, aircraft, and artillery in regard to objectives and timing.

In view of the difficulty of orientation it is necessary to provide a more precise system of mutual recognition signals, target designation, and communications, and also means of indicating the movement of troops toward a certain objective or area in the depth of the enemy's defense. For example, in practice, troops in operations use radio signals, signal panels, illumination (podsvechivaniye), flares, beacons, etc.

In an operational plan there must be a most detailed account of the methods of troop operations for seizing the

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most important mountain passes, gaps, and canyons, and for the crossing of possible areas of radioactive contamination and of the operations, coordinated with respect to timing and objectives, of troops advancing along accessible axes, with units and large units carrying out turning movements (envelopments). Because of the limited number of roads and column routes (kolonnaya put), the movement of missile troops, artillery, second echelons, and reserves calls for particularly thorough planning. It is important to see that those large units which, by their organization and technical equipment, are best fitted for combat operations in the particular area, are in the first echelon. For example, when approach to a valley or a mountain plateau is envisaged, tank units and large units should be moved forward; and, on the other hand, when approaching areas of difficult accessibility, special (mountain-rifle) motorized rifle units and large units which are capable of performing more successfully the task assigned to them under the particular conditions of the terrain should be assigned to the first echelon.

In order to oppose the offensive of the troops of the army and to inflict defeat upon them, the enemy will attempt, even under the least favorable meteorological conditions, to create zones of radioactive contamination on a large scale, using for this purpose not only ground nuclear bursts but also the underground bursts of nuclear land mines (yadernyy fugas). Most probably such zones will be created in areas where army troops will not be able to move at high speed or which they cannot bypass. Under these conditions they will often be forced to cross such zones only after the halt, which will be necessary in order to wait for abatement of high radiation levels and to clear up the destruction which has been caused. In order to avoid heavy casualties among troops from repeated enemy nuclear strikes during this period, it is necessary to carry out the maximum dispersal of units and subunits and to make use of the protective features of the terrain. Helicopters may be used extensively for the transport of command post personnel across zones of radioactive contamination and also for the movement of individual subunits for the seizure of important objectives beyond a contaminated zone.

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The buildup of the efforts of the troops of an army along the axis of the main strike must be carried out, first of all, by concentration of the fire of operational-tactical missiles and also by the commitment to action of individual reserve large units of the front, despite the great complexity of such action.

For this purpose, using the fire of missile troops and aviation strikes, it is necessary to inflict defeat upon the reserves of the enemy which are being moved forward and to destroy his exposed nuclear/missile weapons, and by using the first echelon troops to ensure the seizure of an area suitable for the commitment to battle of the large units of the front's reserve. Road support will be the most difficult problem during this period. The engineer troops of the armies and the front should therefore prepare in advance one or two routes for each large unit of the front reserve.

If, because of the situation, commitment to battle is carried out along an axis of limited capacity, a division may draw up its combat formation in as many as three echelons and may be committed to battle, not from behind a flank or in the intervals between combat formations of the large units of the first echelon, but leapfrogging through the combat formations of first echelon units which have lost their combat effectiveness as the result of enemy nuclear strikes.

During an operation in mountainous terrain, enemy counterattacks will most probably be launched from positions prepared in advance and along the axes leading to the flank and rear of the advancing troops, especially as they emerge from mountainous areas into a wide valley, onto a mountain plateau, or into an area with a sufficiently well-developed road system. Annihilation of an enemy counterattack grouping can be carried out by frontal meeting engagements following nuclear strikes, in conjunction with the operations of individual units carrying out enveloping movements.

One of the important and complex tasks of army troops in


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a mountainous area is the seizure of mountain passes whose capture opens the routes leading to valleys or wide plains. The struggle for a mountain pass is always fierce. The troops will usually be operating under severely restricted conditions and will not always have the opportunity to use nuclear weapons and modern combat equipment to seize mountain passes defended by the enemy.

An air nuclear burst may be used to assure the seizure of a mountain pass and its results must be rapidly exploited by an airborne landing or by a detachment especially dispatched across the mountains. If it is inadvisable to use nuclear weapons because of possible extensive destruction, the enemy should be destroyed by strikes with missiles with chemical charges and by aircraft.

In a situation when the enemy has not yet taken up a defensive position in a mountain pass area and is still moving his units forward for this purpose, it is advantageous to defeat him with strikes of chemical and nuclear weapons in the approaches to the pass, to delay his forward movement, and to seize the pass with airborne forces and with the forward detachment.

In those cases when forward detachments fail to seize passes from the march, divisions advancing along these axes are forced to operate with their main forces, to execute bypassing and enveloping movements along the mountains, and, using only part of their forces, to deliver frontal strikes along the roads leading to the passes.

During an operation conducted in mountainous terrain, especially in the mountain areas of the Near East and Middle East, canyons, which often stretch for considerable distances along a front and which have sheer, precipitous walls, considerable width which sometimes reaches 100 to 200 meters and a depth of 50 to 80 meters or more, may represent serious natural obstacles for the troops. The negotiation of canyons must be carried out from the march, on a wide front. To achieve this, the troops of an army must defeat the enemy decisively in front of the canyon, denying him withdrawal be-


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yond the canyon and preventing the approach of reserves from the depth. The seizure of existing bridges and gaps through canyons is carried out by airborne forces and by the dispatch of strong forward detachments from the large units of the first echelon. Their combat operations are supported by strikes by missile troops, aircraft, and long-range artillery. In this case, the main forces of the army cross the canyon by the bridges and gaps seized by the airborne forces and forward detachments.

In our opinion, the section dealing with the organization and conduct of a defensive operation has been presented by the author in a rather sketchy way and contains some outmoded tenets. Because a transition to the defensive is carried out in most cases during an offensive operation, mainly along the axes of counterstrikes by superior enemy forces, the organization of such a defense will be carried out within a short period of time. Therefore, despite the author's contention that defense consists of defensive zones, it is our view that in a mountainous area it will represent a system of defense areas and strong points.

The basis of a modern defense consists of strikes by nuclear/missile and other fire weapons, and of counterattacks and counterstrikes by troops which, supported by previously prepared defense areas, establish superiority in forces by a skilful maneuver (in the first instance a qualitative superiority) and inflict defeat upon the enemy groupings advancing on one or another axis. In addition, mountain conditions present wide possibilities for the creation of "fire pockets" and for the establishment of specific areas for the delivery of concentrated fire strikes, and for the thorough defeat of the enemy.

The main efforts of the defense are concentrated along the axes accessible to an offensive or in areas suitable for enemy airborne landings. Here, objectives and areas which may be subjected to enemy nuclear/missile strikes should be taken into account. Possibly too, it will be advisable

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to prepare important areas for defense in advance but to have troops occupy them only at the approach of the enemy.

In the conduct of defense in mountainous conditions, the importance of holding separate areas or key positions, which often completely block an entire axis, increases. Therefore, when organizing defense, together with the distribution of forces and means along the axes, it is necessary to occupy and strengthen such important points as mountain gaps, passes, approaches to valleys, road intersections, and other similar objectives.

First echelon divisions of an army, with means of reinforcement which provide them with the independence necessary to conduct combat operations, occupy favorable areas of the terrain or key positions along the axis being defended with regimental forces. A division in its own defense area is capable of preparing up to 4 or 5 positions. The organization of combat formations may vary. More characteristic will be a disposition in which the smaller part of the divisional forces is located in the first echelon, while the larger part constitutes the reserve (second echelon) intended for mobile operations and for the delivery of counterattacks. To defend narrow zones of terrain, a division may even have a three-echelon formation. Intervals not occupied by troops may be covered by obstacles and, in some cases, by separate company or platoon strong points.

The basic forces of a combined-arms reserve are usually disposed on axes along which an offensive by the main enemy forces is expected. If there are not sufficient forces or means to create reserves for all the axes along which it is most likely that the enemy will launch his offensive, subunits and units of the combined-arms reserve and subunits of special troops take up positions in areas where helicopters are based in readiness to move by air in any direction.

Such deep echelonment of the forces and means of an army will make it possible to conduct the most vigorous and highly mobile combat operations and will force the enemy to reform

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his combat formations, regroup his missile troops, and commit to battle his nearest and also, in some cases, his operational, reserves while he is still overcoming the resistance of the first echelon troops.

The author's statement that it is possible to achieve the disruption of an enemy attack by a counterstrike needs elaboration. It would be more correct to say that under modern conditions defense is assigned a decisive goal, and that it is first of all nuclear/missile weapons which make possible the complete disruption of an enemy offensive which is either in preparation or already under way.

During an enemy offensive it is possible to achieve the rout of his grouping (groupings) which is (are) breaking in to restore the situation within the defense, and to create conditions for transition to a counteroffensive, by means of massed nuclear/missile strikes and by a troop counterstrike.

The nature of operations by troops during the delivery of counterattacks and counterstrikes, as well as their tasks and the methods of fulfilling these on each axis, may vary according to the situation. Along one axis the conditions of the terrain may allow the reserve to deploy from the march, while along another it may prove to be advisable, from the first, to take up an advantageous position to inflict defeat from the spot upon the enemy grouping which is breaking through, and then to annihilate it with strikes delivered from several directions. It is also advantageous to deliver a counterstrike from previously prepared lines when these can be occupied without the enemy's knowledge.

Operations on the scale of large units, units, and even subunits, which are separately assigned independent tasks, are a typical feature of the delivery of a counterstrike under these conditions. They will be moved forward along separate routes and will deliver strikes from various directions, and often at different times. This will require of the commanders deep foresight into the development of the defensive battle, and of their staffs, great effectiveness and precision in organizing troop control.

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The skilful use of nuclear/missile weapons and of conventional means of destruction and mobile operations by troops, coupled with the stubborn retention of important defense areas along the main axes, will make it possible to change the balance of forces in favor of the defending troops in a short time, to inflict a decisive defeat upon the enemy, and to create conditions for a transition to the counteroffensive.

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